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ABSTRACT

In this document a discussion of the relationship between foreign language education and bilingual education addresses four questions. In response to the first, "Has foreign language education been supportive of bilingual education?", the proposed answer is that it has not, despite attempts to link the two to justify the existence of foreign language programs. Nonetheless, it is proposed that the survival of both foreign language and bilingual education depends on the encouragement of diversity. The answer to the second question, "Do foreign language teachers consider that they are preparing bilinguals?", is that this is not usually the case because bilingualism is thought of as unattainable. It is suggested that bilingualism should be considered a process rather than a goal. The third question, "How many language teachers consider themselves to be bilingual or bicultural?", is seen as answerable only by individual teachers. Teachers are encouraged to examine how many occasions for interaction in the foreign language they teach they have found in recent years, or how native-speaking language teachers can maintain their differences from the dominant American culture. Finally, in answer to "Is bilingual education affecting foreign language education?", it is concluded that only time will tell how beneficial the relationship is. (MSE)

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LANGUAGE TEACHERS AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION;

ARE WE HELPING OR HURTING?*

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I have come here today with questions not answers. When I first accepted the kind invitation from Mary Metz to speak to you, I chose the topic of Foreign Language Education and Bilingual Education because it is a topic I have had very much on my mind.

As one who has worked most of my professional life as a language teacher, I have found myself asking certain questions as I have begun increasingly to work with persons involved in bilingual education programs, both in the U.S. and in Canada.

Has Foreign Language Education been supportive of Bilingual Education?
As Foreign Language teachers do we consider that we are preparing bilinguals?
How many of us consider ourselves to be bilingual? bicultural?
Is Bilingual Education affecting Foreign Language Education?

I first began to explore these questions with a group of graduate students. Some of these students were doctoral candidates in Bilingual Education, others, M.A. candidates in ESL and Foreign Language Education. As we discussed them, these were some of the reflections that emerged:

If we as a Foreign Language profession were really committed to the preparation of bilinguals why don't we start before age 11?

There is no support for Foreign Language Education in this country. The very creation of a nation state depends upon learning to kill others with a clearer conscience.

When I think of Foreign Language Education I think of literature.

The mark of a successful L₂ teacher is a continual flip-flop between two cultures.

It is within the framework offered by these questions and reflections, then, that I should like to share with you some thoughts on where we stand today as a

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profession, particularly in relation to the issue with which I have been most concerned, the concept of communicative competence in language learning.

Theodore Andersson recently addressed the issue of Bilingual Education in a moving article in the April 1977 issue of the MLJ entitled "What Lessons Does Bilingual Education Hold for Foreign Language Teacher Trainers?" I say it was a moving article because its substance was essentially personal, a personal account of a bilingual, and more importantly a bicultural, who found himself drawn to language teaching. For Andersson, "bicultural-bilingual education--to place these adjectives in the order of their importance--has shed new light on what constitutes an adequate preparation for a foreign language teacher." These are the points he lists:

- 1) Much more often than the foreign language teacher, the bilingual teacher is an authentic native speaker of the non-English language and is an authentic representative of the non-American culture.
- 2) Second, he is much more than a teacher of a second foreign language, which he treats not as a subject of instruction but as a medium for teaching most of the subjects of the curriculum. Experienced bilingual teachers have long believed that better language learning results from this indirect form of instruction than from the direct teaching of language as a subject.
- 3) Third, the bilingual teacher tends to be more affectively oriented than the average foreign language teacher. He is primarily concerned with the self-image of his students, with what they can become, not only with what they can learn.

I think it somehow significant that my own first real awareness of the Bilingual-Bicultural movement came several years ago with an announcement in our departmental bulletin. The announcement told of impending legislation in the State of Illinois which would mandate the presence of a bilingual teacher in schools with ten or more students who were non-native speakers of English. The message was that we should watch for further developments because this legislation could well prove to be a boon for our language teachers in training for whom the job market was getting increasingly tight.

And yet, as Andersson has pointed out, the qualifications of a foreign teacher do not match those of a bilingual teacher. It has been ruefully pointed out that all the effort that was put into training foreign language teachers in the 60's--days of the NDEA (Catch-up-with-the-Russians) Institutes--did nothing to prepare these teachers to take part in the bilingual programs of the 70's. The roles these teachers might have played are now being disputed by teachers of English language arts and a new group of specially trained bilingual teachers.

We have now to ask ourselves if it could have been any other way and if, in fact the present bilingual-bicultural movement can be, in turn, but a fleeting effort in U.S. Education. Bolstered for the moment by federal and state grants of various kinds, those who have taken the lead in bilingual education are struggling with the sheer magnitude of the task at hand, always in the face of pressure to validate programs, to demonstrate achievement in areas for which we do not yet have adequate measures.

Yet the real threat to bilingual education, as it was to FLES programs before it, lies in the attitude of the American public. Some of you, I am sure, are familiar with the New York Times editorial of little less than a year ago (November 22, 1976) entitled "Bilingual Danger." This is what it said, in part:²

The disconcerting strength gathered by separatism in Canada contains a relevant lesson for the United States and its approach to bilingual education. While language is by no means the only factor in the Canadian discord, there can be no question that the linguistic division between French- and English-speaking Canadians has severely intensified their other differences.

It would be a ludicrous distortion to suggest that the United States confronts any danger of actual political separatism as a result of the possible growth of Spanish-speaking enclaves. But it is no exaggeration to warn that the present encouragement given to making such enclaves permanent, in the mistaken view that they are an expression of positive pluralism, points the road to cultural, economic and political divisiveness.

We fully support the proper use of bilingual teaching as a pedagogically sound means of easing pupils' way toward full mastery of English and of making possible effective participation in the general business of learning from the very moment a non-English-speaking youngster enters school. But the purpose of such instruction must be to create English-speaking Americans with the least possible delay.

How pervasive is the attitude expressed in the Times editorial is difficult to know. But it does push us as language teachers to ask ourselves what our own feelings are, what the attitudes of our colleagues, our students are, and if the issue of bilingual education has had any influence on how we think of our own roles as language teachers.

There is evidence that bilingual education has had some impact on Foreign Language Education. The most obvious to me is that we have begun to refer to ourselves as language teachers or modern language teachers rather than foreign language teachers. More important, I hope, is that as bilingual teachers continue to struggle with the problems of language learning and language measurement (both language dominance and language achievement), there will be more support for L₂ teachers who are interested in doing in the classroom the kinds of things that foster the development of communicative competence.

I have talked often of the concept of communicative competence and its implications for language teaching. A useful metaphor to me has been one used by Marshall McLuhan to talk about the impact of new media.³ He calls it the rearview mirror syndrome. He contends that most of us are incapable of understanding the impact of new media because we are like drivers whose gaze is fixed not on where we are going but on where we came from. It is not even a matter of seeing through the windshield but darkly. We are seeing clearly enough, but we are looking at the rearview mirror. Thus the locomotive was first perceived as an "iron horse," the electric light as a powerful candle, and the radio as a thundering megaphone. A mistake, says McLuhan. These media were totally new experiences and did to us totally new things.

In their book, Teaching as a Subversive Activity (1969), Postman and Wingartner have used McLuhan's metaphor in examining the implications of the inquiry method of learning and teaching. The metaphor applies equally well to the implications for second language teaching of the concept of communicative competence.

It is not a refinement or extension or modification of older school environments. It is a different message altogether, and like the locomotive, light bulb and radio, its impact will be unique and revolutionary. Yet the rearview mirror syndrome is already at work.

Most educators who have taken the trouble to think about the method are largely interested to know if it will accomplish the goals that older learning media have tried to achieve: Will students pass the Regents? Will they pass the College Boards? How will they do on "objective" tests?

But... the inquiry method is not designed to do better what older environments try to do. It works you over in entirely different ways. It activates different senses, attitudes and perceptions, it generates a different, bolder and more potent kind of intelligence. Thus, it will cause teachers, and their tests, and their grading systems and their curriculums to change.⁴

The parallel that I should like to draw with McLuhan's metaphor and the implications for second language teaching of the concept of communicative competence is summarized in a recent statement by Albert Valdman on the relationship between two of the latest bandwagons--performance objectives and individualized instruction-- and what looks like it is fast becoming a third: language for communication.

The introduction in foreign language instruction of the notion of performance objectives was motivated by the desire to verify the acquisition of proficiency at various points in the course of study and to justify pedagogical procedures and practices Not only did this result in the neglect of "higher goals of language learning," more recalcitrant to statement in terms of performance objectives, but it led to the perpetuation of the fallacious belief that the ability to use a language for communicative needs is acquired by attainment of stated performance levels in the manipulation of a finite set of discrete linguistic elements: sounds (or phonemes), grammatical forms, sentence patterns, lexical items However, there is ample evidence that suggests that success in communication tasks is not guaranteed by control of stated inventories of linguistic features demonstrated by conventional discrete-item tests⁵. . . . It is clear that traditional performance objectives define neither communicative competence nor minimal communicative competence. They deal with linguistic elements, not speech acts, and they are concerned with manipulative activities, not meaningful intentions.⁶

Thus it is NOT a question as some methodologists would have us believe, of "from linguistic competence to communicative competence" but rather of a mutually reinforcing communicative competence and linguistic competence. It is not a question of patching up existing programs with "communication practice drills," or "pseudo-communication," but of redefining our goals and rethinking our methods. To fully understand what is at stake and thereby understand the wrong-headedness of much of what is currently passing for curricular innovations, language teachers need to look critically at the following three questions:

1. What is communicative competence?
2. What are the implications of the concept of communicative competence for second language teachers and teaching?
3. How can the classroom teacher begin now to make his/her program more meaningful?

First of all, communicative competence is not a method. It is a way of describing what it is a native speaker knows which enables him to interact effectively with other native speakers. This kind of interaction is, by definition, spontaneous, i.e. unrehearsed. It requires much more than a knowledge of the linguistic code. The native speaker knows not only how to say something but what to say and when to say it. The linguistic features of an exchange are embedded in a cultural context which includes the role of the speaker in a particular context, the roles of the other participants and a host of non-verbal communication cues such as distance, posture, gestures, facial expressions.

There are degrees of communicative competence, just as there are degrees of linguistic competence. The acquisition of the linguistic code is, to be sure, a part of the acquisition of communicative competence as a whole. But the focus on surface features of a language--verb forms, use of prepositions, noun endings, word order, pronunciation and the like--all those things with which we as language teachers have traditionally been concerned--does not begin to account for the what and when of language use in interpersonal transactions. More important, native proficiency in the use of all of these discrete linguistic elements is not essential to communicative competence.

Communicative competence can be measured. But traditional tests of second language proficiency are not a good measure of communicative competence. They are, rather, discrete-point or separate measures of proficiency in terms of the elements of language: pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. The assumption underlying the discrete-point approach to testing language proficiency has been that by breaking down a skill into the elements of language and testing these elements separately, we have a more "objective" evaluation than is possible in an admittedly subjective evaluation of performance in an integrated skill. Laudable as these efforts have been, however, they have failed to take sufficiently into account the complexity of the communicative setting. In their emphasis on linguistic accuracy, they have served, moreover, to discourage the development of the strategies which are necessary for the development of communicative competence.

The first implication of the concept of communicative competence, then, is the need for tests which measure not knowledge about language but an ability to use language effectively in an exchange with a native speaker. The development of new kinds of tests must come first due to the importance of tests in shaping all that we do and think in the classroom.

1. First of all, tests serve to measure learner progress. If we teach for communicative competence, we must test for communicative competence so that we and our students know how well we are doing what we purport to be doing.

2. Second, tests serve as a powerful motivating factor. They let the learner know what is really important. We can talk all we want about language for communication, real-language activities, spontaneous transactions, but if verb forms and dialogue recitation are what show up on the test, the students quickly get the message that we don't mean what we say. The discrepancy between linguistic competence and communicative competence shows up nowhere more clearly than in the following reactions of students in an audio-lingual program to a testing situation which they were for the first time required to use what language they had learned in a variety of real-life encounters with native speakers.

If this is an easy test, I just found that I couldn't talk my way out of the airport if I flew to France. I thought it was fun, but very challenging. It doesn't seem as though we've had enough practice speaking off the top of our head. Until this evening I was never forced to say anything except answers to questions or substitute phrases. . . there was no need to search for words. . . they were supplied. I wish we were forced to do this more often. This is what a language should be.

It seems very difficult but it is the first time I have had the chance to actually express myself in French . . . I feel I have an "A" in beginning French writing, reading and grammar but an "F" in actually having a knowledge of the language.

I felt that the whole test was difficult because I was told all semester not to think about what I was saying but rather to see patterns.⁷

3. Third, tests of communicative competence serve to show what students can really do with the language they are learning. From these examples we as teachers and researchers can learn more about second language learning strategies. Second language learning research, while still in its infancy, has cast serious doubts on many commonly held assumptions of how a second language is learned or acquired. To the extent that the second language classroom is tightly controlled in shaping or preventing second language use, the situation is too artificial to provide any meaningful data on second language learning strategies. Once we allow students to use language for their own purposes, however, it will be possible to see how they use what it is they have seen and heard, what meaningful organization they give to the data presented. These insights will provide a basis from which to evaluate the instructional process and goals.

4. Fourth, tests of communicative competence are a much better measure of functional skills for real-world encounters. Could a second language learner get simple directions from a francophone taxi driver in Montréal? Could he coach a basketball team as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala? Could he

serve as a receptionist in a German-American firm? Could he help Chicano children to learn mathematics? Such context specific assessment of language skills moves away from linguistic forms to the concept of bilingual dominance configuration posited by Joshua Fishman.

To return to McLuhan's metaphor, as long as we look to traditional discrete-point tests of second language proficiency for placement and evaluation, we are victims of the rearview mirror syndrome. We are pasting new slogans on old wagons. We have not understood the message of communicative competence.

The second major implication for the classroom of the concept of communicative competence is one of sequence of materials. There is nothing at all sacred about the syllabus which begins with definite and indefinite articles, moves next to noun gender, followed perhaps by present tense of Type I verbs . . . leaving the past tense for sometime in the eighth or ninth unit. The concept of communicative competence means looking not at surface features--the concern of structural linguistics--to give shape and form to our programs. It means, rather, looking at the totality of a communicative situation--with whom, to whom, relationship, context, intent. This concern with speech acts has led some methodologists to propose a syllabus based on how-to's, or a description of language functions as opposed to language form.

The third major implication of the concept of communicative competence is one of process. If linguistic competence is but a part, and not always an essential part at that, of communicative competence, much more emphasis needs to be given to non-linguistic aspects of communication. Gestures, facial expressions and other kinesics can be learned early. They help you to act like a Frenchman long before you have mastered the French /y/ if indeed you ever master the French /y/!

An understanding of the process of second language learning means not only a tolerance but encouragement of risk-taking in saying what you mean. This implies acceptance of "error" as a natural and desirable feature of language learning. It is helpful to think of the notion of error in its entomological sense. It comes from the Latin errare, meaning to wander. The modern French verb is errer. This understanding of error as exploration is crucial, if we are to begin sincerely to make progress toward the development of programs which teach and test communicative competence.

This leads then to the fourth major implication of communicative competence for classroom teachers and teaching, and with it, back to my original questions as to the relationship of language teachers and bilingual education, the need for a profound reexamination of the attitudes we hold toward students, language and language teaching.⁸

My concern with teacher attitudes has grown from experience I have had with language teachers, first as a student, now as a colleague. As I talk with teachers suffering from what Jakobovits has called the Battered Language Teacher (or BALT) Syndrome, teachers beleaguered with new approaches, new data from socio- and psycholinguistics, it has become apparent to me that while we have devised questionnaires and other strategies to discover learner goals and interests, we have not given sufficient attention to the values held by language teachers themselves. There is ample research to show that second language learning does not proceed in a lock-step, error-free, stimulus-response fashion.⁹ Before any meaningful attempts can be made to implement teaching and testing procedures which reflect this understanding of second language learning strategies, however, we have to deal convincingly with the feelings of the classroom teacher. Failure to do so will result in yet another wave of "reform" consisting of a new set of labels--communicative competence, affective learning activities, language for special purposes, notional syllabus--with nothing really changed.

There are days when, following a particularly discouraging professional encounter, I am tempted to agree with Postman and Weingartner who persistently single out teachers of English and their preoccupation with grammar for the "relentless trivialization of the study of language in the schools." They get even nastier in their characterization:

. . . the fact is that many teachers of English are fearful of life and, incidentally, of children. They are pompous and precious, and are lovers of symmetry, categories and proper labels. For them, the language of real human activity is too sloppy, emotional, uncertain, dangerous, and thus altogether too unsettling to study in the classroom . . . Grammarians offer such teachers a respectable out. They give them a game to play, with rules and charts, and with boxes and arrows to draw. Grammar is not, of course, without its controversies, but they are of such a sterile and generally pointless nature that only one who is widely removed from relevant human concerns can derive much stimulation from them.¹⁰

Why is it that with the role of language teacher there seems to come the assignment of language defender, defender of form, defender of tradition against the perceived assaults of diversification and change? What is true of the first language teacher would appear to be true to an even greater extent of the second language teacher. The teacher/defender of a second language shows a particular resistance to language change, often insisting on maintenance of forms which have ceased to be current among native speakers.¹¹ Equally conservative is the preoccupation of second language teachers with formal style, the language of reporting and describing, to the exclusion of colloquial expression, the language of doing. Students learn how to write a book report or describe a news event in French, but they don't learn how to make a friend in French.

Some of you may be familiar with the work of Charles Curran, who has described an approach to teaching which he calls counseling-learning. This model is consonant with the concept of communicative competence. Central to his description of what should go on between teacher and learner is the concept of community, a living dynamic where members relate with one another in a common learning task and no one member has any special power. Community Language Learning involves the teacher as a person, a resource person who helps class members say whatever it is they want to say.¹²

Students in Community Language Learning cite a freedom from tension, a freedom to communicate similar to that which has emerged in research which has been conducted on teaching for communicative competence. Crucial to these feelings, in both instances, is the absence of the teacher as judge and the replacement of an emphasis on grammatical accuracy with a concern for helping students to express their own thoughts.

The problems in getting teachers to accept the role of teacher-counselor rather than that of teacher-evaluator rest in part, as I have suggested, with the language training and even perceived self-inadequacies in the case of the non-native speaker. But, behind this there is the long tradition of language teaching in the schools. It is only of recent date in the history of public education that modern languages have been accepted as worthy of inclusion in the curriculum. In the United States it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that modern languages were offered in public schools. Up until that time, French was considered a suitable diversion for genteel young ladies, along with dancing and embroidery, while their brothers went to school to study Latin and Greek.¹³ So it was that when modern languages were first introduced into the schools, they were taught, as befitted an "academic" subject, on the models of Latin and Greek.

This remains largely true today. In spite of all the apparent concern with teaching for speaking, heralded by the direct and, later, the audiolingual methods, the language teaching profession has remained largely imbued of its classical past, reflecting old academic constraints and concern for respectability as a discipline. Foreign languages still have the reputation for being among the "toughest" subjects in the school curriculum. The attitude still prevails that second language teachers are privileged to have the "best" students in their classes. Leading FL educators still, in 1977, attempt to promote their discipline on the grounds that second language study teaches students how to think. And yet, as has been well documented, second language learning success is not primarily a function of general intelligence or even of language aptitude.

In our concern for "respectability" and, subsequently, for norms and standardization of achievement criteria, we have remained prisoners of academia and failed

to offer our students the kinds of language learning experiences they need most. The following excerpt from an article in a midwestern American newspaper sums up the situation we face:

Long before Joseph Bechard came to Urbana to be assistant superintendent for new program development (and before he was dismissed from that job), he was principal of a high school in Michigan. Something happened one day in Michigan that expanded Bechard's insight about the potential of children who are characterized as incapable of studying "the difficult subjects." And in a sense, that insight is at the heart of his educational philosophy. "We had a student who was doing very poorly in Spanish," Bechard recalled. "He brought in his father for a conference with the boy's teacher and me. My Spanish teacher started explaining, in so many words, why this kid wasn't smart enough to learn Spanish. The father just looked at the teacher a bit perplexed and said, 'Why can't you teach my son the Spanish that the dumb kids speak?'" 14

It is understandable if some language teachers and trainers of future language teachers see, in what they perceive to be a current disregard for grammar, a threat to their own professional identities. Those who have learned the surface structure of a language but are not communicatively competent (more precisely, have not found occasions for acquiring communicative competence) are not likely to be the first to herald teaching strategies which place value on creativity and spontaneity. The apprehensions and insecurities of teachers in training feed their egos--allow them to "show their stuff" one more time to an admiring crowd . . . a crowd of future teachers who will, in turn, conceal their own communicative incompetence behind the structure drills, dialogues, and grammar analyses they will offer to their students. We have produced exactly what the system made it inevitable for us to produce. There has been little or no opportunity for producing anything else. And to quote again Postman and Weingartner, "It is close to futile to talk of any new curriculum unless you are talking about the possibility of getting a new kind of teacher" 15

There are days when, following a particularly encouraging professional encounter, I would assert that we do have that kind of new teacher. There are many teachers as well as community and government groups striving to make language teaching and testing more reflective of real language needs. Numerous conferences and workshops, both here and abroad, exploring the implications of teaching for communication reflect the concern and commitment of the leaders of our profession for effective changes which will benefit all of us. To be successful, these efforts must begin with an exploration of the attitudes and motivations of the teachers themselves, teachers in relation to other teachers, teachers in relation to their students, and teachers in relation to the language and culture they teach.

In conclusion, I should like to return to the questions with which I began regarding the relationship of language teachers and bilingual education and this time suggest some tentative responses:

Has Foreign Language Education been supportive of Bilingual Education?

No, not really, although today there are attempts to link the two to justify the existence of foreign language programs. It is clear, however, that the survival of both depends on the encouragement of diversity and cross-cultural understanding.

As Foreign Language teachers do we consider that we are preparing bilinguals?

Not usually. Somehow the term "bilingual" for us remains some kind of absolute, something we don't really consider within our grasp. We need to learn to think of "bilingual" as a process, not a goal.

How many of us consider ourselves to be bilingual? bicultural?

That is a question each of us can best answer individually. Do we, in fact, flip-flop between two cultures? What occasions have we found in the last 5 years, 10 years, for interacting in the language we teach. If that language is our native language, how successfully can we maintain that delicate and sometimes painful balance of being at once different from and like the dominant American culture?

Is Bilingual Education affecting Foreign Language Education?

Hopefully. Only time will give us the answer to this one. Perhaps those of us here today will help to make a difference.

Footnotes

¹Andersson, Theodore, "What Lessons Does Bilingual Education Hold for Foreign Language Teacher Trainers?", Modern Language Journal, LXI, 4 (April 1977), pp. 159-160.

²New York Times, Editorial Page, November 22, 1976.

³The discussion that follows is very similar to a portion of Savignon, Sandra J. "Communicative Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice." ERIC Reports, Ed 135 245, April 1976.

⁴Neil Postman and Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969), pp. 26-27.

⁵Albert Valdman, "On the Specification of Performance Objectives in Individualized Foreign Language Instruction," Modern Language Journal, 49, No. 7 (November 1965), pp. 353-54.

⁶Valdman, p. 355.

⁷For a full account of this study, see Sandra J. Savignon, Communicative Competence: An Experiment in Foreign Language Teaching (Montreal: Marcel Didier, Ltée., 1972).

⁸For further elaboration of the importance of teacher attitude, see Sandra J. Savignon, "On the Other Side of the Desk: A Look at Teacher Attitudes and Motivations in Second-Language Learning," in Anthony Mollica, ed., Attitude and Motivation in Second Language Learning, Special Issue of The Canadian Modern Language Review, February 1976.

⁹See, for example, Ervin-Tripp, "Is Second Language Learning Like the First?" TESOL Quarterly, 8 (June 1976), pp. 111-127; Dulay and Burt, "A New Perspective on the Creative Construction Process in Child Second Language Acquisition," Language Learning, 24 (December 1974), pp. 253-78; Selinker, Swain and Dumas, "The Interlanguage Hypothesis Extended to Children," Language Learning 25 (June 1975), pp. 139-52.

¹⁰Postman and Weingartner, p. 55.

¹¹So it is that teachers of French continue to insist on the use of se rendre compte long after réaliser has become common in both written and spoken French.

¹²For an introduction to the concept of Community Language Learning, see Charles A. Curran, Counseling-Learning (New York: Grune & Stratton, Inc., 1972), pp. 30-31.

¹³See George B. Watts, "The Teaching of French in the United States," French Review, 37 (October, Part II, 1963), pp. 11-65.

¹⁴Champaign-Urbana Courier (Champaign, Illinois), February 23, 1974.

¹⁵Postman and Weingartner, p. 56.